



## Heritage Elementary School

440 Parr Road

Woodburn OR 97071-5568

Principal: Irene Novichihin

---

Heritage Elementary School offers a rich, multifaceted array of programs for its distinctive trilingual mix of students. While 70% of the students are Hispanic, 11% are Russian Old Believers and 18% are White. Beginning in the 1990s, when the district grew and the number of limited-English-proficient students doubled, the staff set about to find better ways to meet the needs of their English learners. Believing that “there are no simple, short-term solutions to closing the achievement gap—systemic change takes time,” they created a strategic plan that has evolved ever since to address each new challenge.

- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
- ◆ 70% Hispanic
- ◆ 18% White
- ◆ 11% Russian
- ◆ 60% English Language Learners
- ◆ 87% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Current program strands include mainstream English, bilingual Spanish, heritage dual-language Russian, and a new dual-language Spanish strand. Expectations for the progression of instruction across grade levels are clearly spelled out for each strand, and for the different classes during the day.

For example, for English language development (ELD) classes, each with a mix of Spanish and Russian speakers, students are homogeneously grouped into three levels of proficiency. (Language proficiency is assessed by a standardized language test and formal follow-up assessments.) Students meet in ELD classes for 40 minutes each day, with instruction focused on the forms and functions of language. “The students are learning some vocabulary, learning to use that vocabulary, and then to develop more and more complex sentence structures.”

This 2006-07 school year, ELD teachers are concentrating on writing. A decade ago, ESL classes focused on oral language. As the staff “started working on academic and cognitive language and reading,” they found that writing scores were not keeping pace with reading scores: “We weren’t necessarily teaching grammar and syntax well enough.” They turned, therefore, to the work of



Susanna Dutro, which had been adopted by the state of Oregon for ELD standards, and “decided to go more into language forms and functions” and the more cognitively demanding activity of writing.

This ELD instruction is coordinated with the core academic instruction that takes place during other class periods. When students start a unit of study in science or social studies, for example, essential vocabulary is taught and reinforced in both places.

In winter 2007, the fifth grade was studying colonial communities, and students learned vocabulary related to house construction, jobs, dress, and other features of community life. One ELD lesson focused on describing the similarities and differences between things. Explained the teacher, “The point of the lesson in terms of forms and functions was to do similarities and differences and how you put a sentence together if you’re talking about ‘This house is red with a tall chimney,’ but (*but* is your connector word) ‘this house is orange with no chimney at all.’ I was trying to stretch them to a more complex sentence, and we were looking at connecting words and celebrating when somebody could use a connecting word.”

The five specialist teachers at Heritage—PE, music, computer, poetry/drama, and writing workshop—continue the same approach. Students rotate through these classes in seven-week blocks. All instruction is in English, and students are mixed across language and proficiency levels. Lesson plans have a content objective and a language objective; teachers adapt and group students according to the proficiency mix in each classroom. Playing a key role in getting these lesson plans developed, several years ago Woodburn School District brought in a trainer to work with teachers from across the district on standards-based curriculum design. Specialist teachers from across the district worked together in job-alike groups to develop lesson plans.

All teachers at Heritage have also been trained in a variety of instructional approaches. The staff speak highly of one training in language acquisition that conveyed the message “you are actually teaching language, English language, through the content area and throughout the day”—a philosophy clearly embraced by the staff. Teachers have also been trained in sheltered instruction, which is used in mainstream and content area classes to differentiate instruction for the mix of language proficiencies in the class. “Are you using the content as



your vehicle to teach language, or are you trying to teach the content? If you combine it, it can be very powerful instruction.”

Professional development is ongoing within the school. Grade-level teams meet once or twice a week, while students are with specialists. A vertical team makes sure “things are stacking up from grade to grade,” and is spearheading the current focus on writing. Formal training is interspersed throughout the year, so that teachers can work together to apply what they have learned between sessions.

Through this thorough approach to learning and implementing new approaches, teachers across Heritage have applied concepts derived from the architecture of infusing language throughout the curriculum to very specific instructional techniques. One technique you might see is the “ten-two rule,” where the teacher conducts a mini-lesson for the students and then has the students, in partners, do an activity. “The teacher wouldn’t go any longer than ten minutes without having at least two minutes of partner share or triad sharing.” Students using language is always central to every learning activity.